

Message Text

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USMISSION USEC BRUSSELS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, SP

SUBJ: MADRID SUBWAY STRIKE POSES LABOR TEST FOR REGIME

REF: MADRID 9052

1. TODAY IS THIRD DAY OF MADRID SUBWAY STRIKE, WHICH HAS CAUSED GREAT INCONVENIENCE TO MADRID'S TWO MILLION SUBWAY USERS, MOST OF THEM ALSO WORKERS. DISPUTE IS RELATED TO WAGE DEMANDS OF THE 3,500 MADRID SUBWAY WORKERS, WITH THEIR PRIMARY COMPLAINT BEING THAT PRIVATELY OWNED SUBWAY COMPANY WAS RECENTLY ALLOWED BY THE GOVT TO INCREASE SUBWAY FARES BUT HAS REFUSED TO PASS ON ANY OF THE INCREASE TO SUBWAY WORKERS IN INCREASED WAGES. SUBWAY STRIKE WAS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ACCOMPANIED BY A SIT-IN BY STRIKING SUBWAY WORKERS AND FAMILY

MEMBERS AT A MADRID CHURCH, WHICH COMMENCED WITH 300 PERSONS JANUARY 5, BUT INCREASED TO 2,000 PERSONS, AND POLICE FINALLY MOVED TO DISSOLVE SIT-IN WITH JUST ENOUGH FORCE TO DO THE TRICK. THERE WERE ALSO SEVERAL CLASHES WITH POLICE EVICTING SUBWAY WORKERS AND SYMPATHIZERS FROM SUBWAY COMPANY PREMISES.

2. THE GOVT HAS BEEN SEEKING TO END THE STRIKE THROUGH MEDIATION. YESTERDAY A DELEGATION FROM THE STRIKING SUBWAY WORKERS WAS RECEIVED BY THE SYNDICAL MINISTER RODOLFO MARTIN VILLA. ADDITINALLY, AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE CABINET WAS HELD YESTERDAY WHICH (A) APPROVED MEASURES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF EMERGENCY BUS ROUTES AROUND THE CITY TO SEEK TO ALLEVIATE THE PROBLEM OF SUBWAY USERS PENDING A SETTLEMENT, (B) RECOGNIZED THE LEGITIMACY OF SOME OF THE STRIKING SUBWAY WORKERS DEMANDS, AND (C) REMINDED THE SUBWAY WORKERS THAT THEIR STRIKE WAS ILLEGAL AND CAUSING GREAT INCONVENIENCE TO THE MADRID PUBLIC AND POINTED OUT THAT THE GOVERNMENT COULD USE VARIOUS LEGAL MEANS, INCLUDING, IF NECESSARY, MILITARY MOBILIZATION.

3. OTHER LABOR DEVELOPMENTS INCLUDE: (A) CONTINUATION OF THE LONG-STANDING STRIKE AT THE STANDARD-ITT FACTORIES OUTSIDE MADRID OVER THE COLLECTIVE BARGINING CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS WHICH IS NOW ONE MONTH OLD, AND IN WHICH WORKERS PARTICIPATING USUALLY STRIKE FOR FOUR HOURS EACH DAY AND WORK THE OTHER FOUR, (B) COMMENCEMENT ONCE AGAIN OF INTERMITTENT CONTRAXT-RELATED STRIKES AT THE CHRYSLER FACTORY, AS WELL AS A 24 HOUR SIT-IN OF 300 STRIKE CHRYSLER WORKERS AT A MADRID CHURCH, AND (C) THE TERMINATION OF CHURCH SIT-INS OF WORKERS FOR TWO SPANISH COMPANIES IN BILBAO AND SEVILLE OVER LABOR PROBLEMS AT THEIR RESPECTIVE FIRMS (REF).

4. COMMENT: GOVT'S RESTRAINED AND CONCILIATORY HANDLING OF CURRENT MADRID SUBWAY STRIKE CONTRASTS WITH HANDLING OF LAST MADRID SUBWAY STRIKE IN 1971. IN CURRENT STRIKE, GOVT HAS ONLY MADE VEILED REFERENCE TO POSSIBILITY OF A MILITARY MOBILIZATION OF SUBWAY WORKERS AS A LAST RESORT (THE CLUB USED IN 1971) AND HAS DEMONSTRATED MORE SYMPATHETIC ATTITUDE. NOTWITHSTANDING THIS, GOVT MAY HAVE TO STEP IN WITH MORE SEVERE MEASURES TO FORCE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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STRIKERS BACK TO WORK IF DISPUTE DRAGS ON, AS IT CANNOT AFFORD TO HAVE SUCH AN IMPORTANT PUBLIC UTILITY IDLED FOR LONG BY A STRIKE, ALTHOUGH THERE SOME SPECULATION GOVT MAY BE WAITING TO GET PUBLIC OPINION, ANGERED BY DISRUPTION CAUSED BY STRIKE, FULLY BEHIND IT BEFORE TAKING STRONGER MEASURES.
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